

Years 3 & 4 · Free resource

Adding suffixes to multisyllable words: the stress-and-doubling rule

Year group: 3/4

Source: DfE, *English Appendix 1: Spelling*, National Curriculum for England (2013) — Years 3–4, Word endings

Curriculum requirement: Statutory

The rule

In Year 2, children learned to double the final consonant of a **one-syllable** word before a vowel suffix (run → running, hop → hopped). In Years 3/4, this rule extends to words of more than one syllable — but with an important condition:

Double the consonant only if the stress falls on the final syllable.

begin → **beginning** (stress on *-gin* → double the *n*)

garden → **gardening** (stress on *gar-* → do NOT double the *n*)

The test: say the word aloud and tap the syllables. Which syllable gets the emphasis?

*be-**GIN*** → stress on last syllable → double: **beginning**

GAR-den → stress on first syllable → do not double: **gardening**

How to apply it

Step 1: Check that the base word ends in a single vowel + single consonant (the CVC pattern)

Step 2: Check that the suffix begins with a vowel (*-ing, -ed, -er, -en*)

Step 3: Say the base word. Where is the stress?

Last syllable stressed → **double**

Any other syllable stressed → **do not double**

Examples: double because stress is on final syllable

Base word	Suffix	Result
<i>begin</i>	-ing	beginning
<i>forget</i>	-ing	forgetting
<i>prefer</i>	-ed	preferred
<i>prefer</i>	-ing	preferring
<i>occur</i>	-ed	occurred
<i>occur</i>	-ence	occurrence
<i>refer</i>	-ed	referred
<i>refer</i>	-ing	referring
<i>commit</i>	-ed	committed
<i>commit</i>	-ment	commitment (<i>note: -ment starts with consonant – no doubling</i>)
<i>transmit</i>	-ed	transmitted
<i>permit</i>	-ed	permitted
<i>regret</i>	-ed	regretted

Base word	Suffix	Result
<i>patrol</i>	-ing	patrolling

Examples: do NOT double because stress is elsewhere

Base word	Suffix	Result	Why
<i>garden</i>	-ing	gardening	stress on GAR-
<i>listen</i>	-ing	listening	stress on LIS-
<i>open</i>	-ed	opened	stress on O-
<i>offer</i>	-ed	offered	stress on OF-
<i>enter</i>	-ing	entering	stress on EN-
<i>limit</i>	-ed	limited	stress on LIM-
<i>visit</i>	-ed	visited	stress on VIS-
<i>profit</i>	-ed	profited	stress on PROF-
<i>travel</i>	-ed	travelled (<i>British English doubles l – see note</i>)	

British English exception: the *-l* rule

In British English, words ending in *-l* after a single vowel **always** double the *l* before a vowel suffix, regardless of stress. This differs from American English.

Word	British English	American English
<i>travel</i>	travelled, traveller	traveled, traveler
<i>cancel</i>	cancelled	canceled
<i>quarrel</i>	quarrelling	quarreling
<i>signal</i>	signalled	signaled

This is a British English convention, not a stress rule. Teach it as a separate fact for words ending in *-l*.

The -fer pattern (preview of Y5/6)

Words ending in *-fer* show this rule very clearly:

Word	Suffix	Stress stays on -fer?	Result
<i>refer</i>	-ing	Yes (<i>re-FER</i>)	referring
<i>refer</i>	-ence	No (stress shifts: <i>REF-er-ence</i>)	reference (no double)
<i>prefer</i>	-ed	Yes (<i>pre-FER</i>)	preferred
<i>prefer</i>	-ence	No (stress shifts: <i>PREF-er-ence</i>)	preference (no double)

This is taught fully at Y5/6 but can be introduced here with high-attaining pupils.

Common mistakes

Wrong	Right	Reason
<i>begining</i>	beginning	Stress on <i>-gin</i> : double the <i>n</i>
<i>forgeting</i>	forgetting	Stress on <i>-get</i> : double the <i>t</i>
<i>gardenning</i>	gardening	Stress on <i>GAR-</i> : no double
<i>ocurred</i>	occurred	Stress on <i>-cur</i> : double the <i>r</i>
<i>referred</i>	referred	Stress on <i>-fer</i> : double the <i>r</i>
<i>travled</i>	travelled	British English: always double <i>l</i>

Word sort

Sort these words: double or no double?

Base words + suffix: begin+ing · garden+ing · forget+ing · open+ed · prefer+ed · limit+ed · occur+ed · visit+ing · commit+ed · enter+ing · refer+ed · travel+ed

Double the consonant	Do not double

Classroom questions

Say *begin* aloud. Which syllable is stressed? What does that tell us about *beginning*?

Say *garden* aloud. Which syllable is stressed? What does that tell us about *gardening*?

Why does *preferred* have a double *r* but *preference* does not?

In British English, *travel* becomes *travelled*. Why might this be an exception?

Can you find three words in your reading book that end in *-ing*? Which ones doubled the consonant?

Links to other rules

Y2: doubling rule for one-syllable words — the foundation this rule builds on

Y5/6: -fer words — the clearest demonstration of stress-based doubling

Source: DfE English Appendix 1: Spelling (2013). All examples verified against standard British English usage and the statutory content for Years 3–4.